

# Perilous Journey:

## *Kidnapping and Violence against Migrants in Transit through Mexico*



Every year, hundreds of thousands of undocumented Central American migrants, primarily from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, travel through Mexico on their way to the U.S. border. These migrants are vulnerable during their journey through Mexico, due both to the clandestine nature in which they are obligated to travel and to the generalized context of violence and impunity that dominates Mexico. Many suffer grave human rights abuses and violence along their journey at the hands of organized crime and corrupt officials. Kidnapping and extortion of migrants are among the most lucrative—and brutal—practices by organized crime in Mexico and are pervasive along the migratory route.

Roughly five years ago, advocates at migrant shelters along the south-north train route began to systematically document and gather first-hand accounts of migrants who had survived kidnapping. What may have initially appeared to be sporadic and anecdotal accounts were soon recognized as reflecting a true humanitarian crisis rooted in flawed migration policy and a culture of impunity. A series of 33 of these testimonies were published by the *Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez* (Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center, or *Center Prodh*) and the *Casa del Migrante de Saltillo* (Migrant Shelter of Saltillo, Coahuila) in the *Cuaderno sobre Secuestro de Migrantes* (Report on Migrant Kidnappings) in December 2011.<sup>1</sup>

In the pages that follow, English translations of a sampling of those testimonies can be found. The migrants' testimonies vividly describe their experiences

during kidnapping—rape and sexual assault; physical abuse and mutilation; torture; food and sleep deprivation. In some cases, victims were forced to serve as witnesses to sexual and physical assaults, and even murder. In others, migrants were forced to carry out physical abuse of fellow kidnapping victims.

Although it is difficult to read the accounts of the barbaric treatment that many migrants endured, these testimonies help us to grasp the profound human impact of this crisis and confirm the experiences recounted by kidnapped migrants elsewhere. From these stories, we get a more complete picture of the depth of this humanitarian crisis that has destroyed the dignity and safety of thousands of victims and traumatized families and communities across the region.

### Central American Migrants in Transit

As a sending, receiving, and transit country for migrants, Mexico plays a unique role in the Americas. Although the passage of Central Americans through Mexico en route to the United States has occurred for decades, it has been impossible to put a precise figure on this flow because the majority of these migrants are undocumented and cross through Mexico clandestinely. What is known is that migrant shelters are full across Mexico—an indication that thousands of Central Americans continue the journey north, seeking jobs, improved quality of life, and to be reunited with family, despite the grave dangers.

*Introduction by Jennifer Johnson with translated testimonies from the Cuaderno sobre secuestro de migrantes, edited by the Casa del Migrante Saltillo and the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez*

Mexico's Secretary of the Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación*) cites that roughly 150,000 undocumented migrants, the vast majority from Central America, enter Mexico each year with the goal of reaching the United States, but civil society groups estimate that this number reaches 400,000.<sup>2</sup> This flow of migrants from Central America is composed almost exclusively of individuals from the Northern Triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), many fleeing deteriorating conditions, spiraling violence and poverty in their home countries.

Although it is unknown how many migrants ultimately arrive at their intended destination in the United States, figures on those who were apprehended and deported by authorities are available. According to the National Immigration Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*, or INM, an agency of the Secretary of the Interior), Mexico deported 77,028 individuals from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in 2012, a figure that comprises

roughly 97 percent of all deportations from Mexico. (This figure is up from 58,718 in 2011 and 62,788 in 2010.)<sup>3</sup> In 2010, 45,709 individuals from these three Central American nations were apprehended by U.S. Border Patrol after arriving in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

## The Journey

To make their clandestine journey, many Central American migrants attempt the shortest path across Mexico, a route through the states along Mexico's Gulf coast up to South Texas. Unlike other regions of the border, non-Mexicans, predominantly from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, made up a slight majority of apprehensions by the Border Patrol in South Texas in 2012.<sup>5</sup> Although this may be the most direct route, it still entails covering well over 1,000 miles of ground, crossing through regions dominated by grisly turf wars, the Zetas, and other criminal groups and corrupt officials that systematically target migrants for violence and abuse.



Source: Insight Crime, "Part III - The Gauntlet," August 2013. <http://www.insightcrime.org/violence-against-migrants/part-iii-the-gauntlet>\*

While passenger bus, walking, and private vehicles are all utilized by some undocumented Central American migrants to traverse Mexico, riding on top of the roofs of northbound freight trains has long been a primary mode of transport for countless undocumented, impoverished migrants without the means or connections to arrange for more secure transportation. The chilling nicknames for the trains—“*La Bestia*” (the beast) or “*el tren de la muerte*” (the Train of Death)—hint at the dangers that migrants encounter there.

Countless migrants have lost limbs—or their lives—when they fall or are pushed off the moving train. Organized crime has a heavy presence along the train route, as well as on the train itself, and migrant rights defenders and migrants have identified train personnel as working with organized crime in carrying out the kidnapping and extortion of migrants.<sup>6</sup> Immigration enforcement raids have targeted trains carrying migrants, who flee, only to be intercepted by organized crime members working in collusion with corrupt authorities.

Migrant advocates have described extortion taking place on the tops of the trains themselves, with organized crime members threatening to harm migrants or push them off the train if they refuse to pay a “passage fee.” Migrant rights defenders from the “72” Shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco have reported that the train routes crossing through Tabasco and Veracruz are controlled by organized crime, with organized crime forcing undocumented migrants to pay \$100 to ride the train. Migrant rights defender Ruben Figueroa stated that, “If you don’t pay, they’ll beat you and throw you off the train. The situation has reached an alarming, emergency level.”<sup>7</sup> Migrant advocates have noted that these train-top extortions have reached such a dangerous level that some migrants opt to travel by foot, despite the great distances and associated hardships.

The fact that migrants are forced by their undocumented status to travel clandestinely, have limited resources, and are in an unfamiliar region makes them more vulnerable during each and every stage of their journey. In addition to kidnappings along the train route,

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there are numerous reports of migrants and Mexican nationals being forced off passenger buses in transit to the border. Those seeking to extort and exploit migrants take advantage of this vulnerability: migrant advocates have documented cases in which kidnappings take place when migrants are approached by people pretending to be guides who then invite migrants to hotels or other lodgings or offer them food, work or transportation; they are then kidnapped or enslaved by organized crime.<sup>8</sup>

## Perpetrators of Violence against Central American Migrants

As few cases of migrant kidnapping are reported to authorities, and even fewer investigated, direct testimonies from migrants provide important insight into who is perpetrating this targeted violence. As reflected in the testimonies, the kidnapping, torture, extortion, and other acts of brutality generally involve armed criminal groups. The Zetas are the criminal organization most frequently cited by migrants and media accounts as preying on migrants, although other criminal groups are also involved.

Collusion or direct involvement of municipal, state, and federal authorities is also a constant theme, although the lack of official investigation into these violent acts makes it very difficult to

## San Fernando Massacre: Raising the Alarm

Migrant rights defenders have been sounding the alarm regarding targeted violence and abuse against migrants in transit for many years and, starting in the mid-2000's, these included growing reports of mass kidnapping of migrants as well. But it wasn't until a mass grave of 72 executed migrants from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Brazil and Ecuador was found on a ranch outside San Fernando, Tamaulipas, a town roughly 90 miles south of Brownsville, Texas, on August 25, 2010, that the Mexican government was forced to acknowledge the scope and gravity of the migrant kidnapping crisis.

In the weeks and months that followed the discovery of this massacre, additional mass graves containing the remains of over 190 individuals were found in San Fernando in over 40 clandestine grave sites.<sup>9</sup> Many are presumed to be the remains of passengers from Central America and southern Mexico reportedly forced off passenger buses en route to the U.S. border by organized crime at makeshift roadblocks and then kidnapped, including cases that involved the collusion or direct participation of authorities.<sup>10</sup>

Despite having drawn international attention, the investigation into the massacre at San Fernando has been fraught with irregularities, including the misidentification of remains and the disclosure of the names of the surviving witnesses. Some victims' family members who sought the assistance of the authorities were subsequently threatened, creating a chilling effect.

Although government officials attributed these grisly crimes to a dispute between the Zetas and Gulf Cartel, the involvement of corrupt authorities is suspected by advocates and families. The federal Attorney General (*Procuraduría General de la República*) detained 17 police officers amongst the 70 individuals in connection with this massacre.<sup>11</sup>

Although this incident drew the eyes of the world to the horrors of migrant kidnapping in Mexico, many have been angered by the failure of authorities to make meaningful progress towards protecting victims or preventing future kidnappings in its wake.

understand the full role played by authorities.<sup>12</sup> Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, or CNDH) has issued a series of case reports (called "recommendations") against the federal police, military, and other federal authorities in response to allegations of robbery, extortion, sexual assault, kidnapping, and other human rights abuses against migrants.<sup>13</sup>

Officials from the Mexican agency responsible for managing migration, the National Immigration Institute (Instituto Nacional de Migración, or INM), have been repeatedly accused of a variety of human rights violations against migrants, including extortion, sexual

assault of minors,<sup>14</sup> and selling migrants in their custody to organized crime. In one example, the Mexican weekly *Proceso* reported that a group of 120 Central Americans and Mexicans who were kidnapped off a bus in Tamaulipas and turned over to organized crime later identified that INM officials had been their kidnappers.<sup>15</sup> Between January 2006 and December 2012, 883 INM officials were dismissed, fined, or suspended for acts of corruption and suspected ties to organized crime, and other offenses,<sup>16</sup> including human trafficking.<sup>17</sup> Although President Peña Nieto has promised to end the corruption that has long plagued the INM, advocates have expressed frustration with the lack of progress.<sup>18</sup>



Beyond counting on the tolerance or outright collusion of authorities, Mexico's organized crime cartels have forged relationships with smaller gangs to carry out systematic violence against migrants. Father Rigoni of the Casa del Migrante shelter in Tapachula, Chiapas (on Mexico's southern border) told reporters, "The [organized crime] chiefs give the green light to new recruits to do their business on the train. They monitor the recruits in their ability in their turf to handle logistics, strategy, and organization. They are applying market policy. The Zetas choose a little gang in Tapachula: If you can prove you control the turf, and pay us \$500,000, you can rely on us for military support."<sup>19</sup>

## Types of Violence Suffered by Central American Migrants

As reflected in these testimonies, organized crime and corrupt officials have targeted migrants as an exceptionally vulnerable group they can exploit for profit with virtual impunity. Crimes and abuses include kidnapping for ransom or to sell to other organized crime groups,<sup>20</sup> human smuggling, extorting migrants for fees for safe passage in regions of Mexico or across the border, or forcing migrants under threat to work for organized crime as drug mules, cooks, or prostitutes.<sup>21</sup> The testimonies of the survivors illustrate the magnitude of this last problem, particularly in the states of Tamaulipas, Zacatecas, and Coahuila, as well as the area around Monterrey, Nuevo León.

These crimes involve horrific brutality. The testimonies speak to the physical and psychological torture that the immigrant victims endure in kidnappings, including beatings; mutilation; deprivation of food, clothes, and sleep; threats with guns, machetes or knives; sexual assault and rape; verbal threats about harming family members; and forcing kidnapping victims to beat their fellow victims, and to view murders and sexual assaults.

Criminal groups that target migrants for profit generate millions of dollars each year through kidnapping for ransom, extortion, passage fees, and other forms of exploitation of migrants. Ransom payments can run into the thousands of dollars, forcing impoverished families to scrape together the funds, perhaps selling their homes. A report on migrant kidnapping issued by the CNDH in 2009 indicated that of the 9,758 migrant kidnapping victims they identified between September 2008 and February 2009, ransoms paid were between US\$1,500 and US\$5,000, with the average being \$2,500 per person, generating roughly \$25 million for the kidnappers during this six-month period.<sup>22</sup> The ransom is a further financial burden for families who may have already paid or committed many thousands of dollars to bring their loved ones north.<sup>23</sup> As indicated in several testimonies, migrants who do not have family who are able to pay for their release have been targets for torture or execution as a warning to other kidnapped migrants or their families.

## Also Targeted: The Recently Deported

Not all migrants who shared their testimonies are from Central America. Deported Mexicans are also targets for extortion and kidnapping. In some cities along the U.S.-Mexico border recently deported migrants have been identified by

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criminals and corrupt authorities as easy targets for recruitment by organized crime, extortion, or kidnapping, particularly as they may be disoriented and desperate, having been deported to an unfamiliar city without any support network, or assumed to have contacts in the United States who could provide ransom payments.<sup>24</sup>

According to Mexico's National Migration Institute, the United States carried out 369,492 repatriations of Mexicans in 2012, down from 601,356 in 2009. However, this data also shows shifts in the locations where migrants are deported, with a growing percentage deported through South Texas. In 2008, only 8% of Mexican migrants were repatriated through Tamaulipas, but this rose to 33% in 2012,<sup>25</sup> even though several of the repatriation locations in Tamaulipas, including Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, and Reynosa, are notorious for control by organized crime, high numbers of homicides and high incidence of municipal police corruption. Conversely, repatriations through regions with more services and relatively safer conditions for migrants, such as Sonora, have decreased, despite that fewer Mexicans are apprehended across the

border from Tamaulipas in the Laredo and Rio Grande Valley sectors than across the border from Sonora in the Tucson and Yuma sectors.<sup>26</sup> This can be attributed, in part, to the Alien Transfer and Exit Program (ATEP), part of the "consequence delivery system" employed by Customs and Border Protection whereby individuals apprehended in one sector of the border are transferred to another sector along the border for repatriation based on a claim that this will break the connection between the migrant and smuggler, although recent research indicate that lateral repatriation has no impact on whether or not a migrant will attempt to cross the border again.<sup>27</sup> A migrant's vulnerability is exacerbated by other repatriation practices, including separating spouses and family members travelling together,<sup>28</sup> nighttime repatriations,<sup>29</sup> and failure of U.S. authorities to return personal belongings, including identification cards and cell phones, to migrants prior to deportation.<sup>30</sup>

Some deportation practices employed by U.S. authorities exacerbate the migrants' vulnerability and reflect a failure of U.S. and Mexican authorities to take migrants' security and safety

into consideration when determining how deportations occur. Advocates have documented numerous cases in which migrants were deported at night, when services and shelters have closed their doors. Father Gallardo, a priest who runs migrant shelters in Tamaulipas, told LA Times Reporter Richard Marosi, “Deporting people here is like sending them into a trap ... to be hunted down.”<sup>31</sup>

Axel García, former Director of Advocacy for the *Dimensión Pastoral para la Movilidad Humana*, a program for migrants run by the Catholic Bishops Conference that works with 50 migrant shelters across Mexico, told *El Proceso* that “our people are forced to return to Mexico without documents. The majority arrive to a city that they don’t know, without the chance to speak with their families, and without any resources to return to their home communities.”<sup>32</sup> Findings from a recent study by the University of Arizona would seem to confirm this statement, having documented that 39% of migrants interviewed were deported without their belongings, including identification documents, cell phones, and money, items that would enable them to make the next step in their journey. Migrants who had been with a group may now be alone, separated from their families or traveling companions and deported hundreds of miles from where they were originally apprehended as part of ATEP.

## Lack of Access to Justice

Many migrants are highly reluctant to report kidnapping out of fear of reprisals by organized crime, lack of familiarity with mechanisms to report violence or confidence that authorities will take their case seriously, or concern that reporting what they have endured could delay their journey north, their ultimate goal.

There is also the legitimate fear of further abuse by corrupt or unscrupulous authorities, and the fear of being deported. Despite provisions in Mexico’s national immigration law, many migrant victims are denied a humanitarian visa that should allow them to remain in the country to assist in the investigation of their case, and the lack of adequate witness protection leaves migrants highly vulnerable while waiting

for their case to be processed.<sup>33</sup> It has been noted by some migrant rights defenders that when migrants register complaints with the *Ministerio Público* (Mexico’s investigative agencies), serious crimes such as kidnapping are downgraded to minor crimes, making them ineligible for a humanitarian visa.

Further compounding problems, many defenders have expressed frustration that authorities fail to acknowledge or advance investigations of kidnappings and have seen that even in cases in which they have the opportunity to speak with eyewitnesses or victims, authorities attempt to discredit accounts of migrants. Like so many crimes and human rights abuses committed against vulnerable populations, impunity prevails as the vast majority of cases of migrant kidnappings go uninvestigated and perpetrators are not held responsible.

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## Responses by the Mexican Government

After years of indifference to the abuses experienced by migrants, President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) was forced to respond to the issue of violence against migrants crossing through Mexico after the horrific discovery of the mass grave of 72 migrants in San Fernando, Tamaulipas in 2010. A week after this grisly discovery was made, President Calderón announced a “Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent and Combat Migrant Kidnapping (*Estrategia Integral para la Prevención y Combate al Secuestro de Migrantes*), which entailed a series of measures, including improved coordination between federal and state agencies to assist migrant crime victims and development and implementation of a plan to dismantle criminal groups that prey on migrants.<sup>34</sup> Although positive on its face, the failure to implement



these measures rendered this proposal largely meaningless.<sup>35</sup>

Entering Mexico without a visa or immigration papers is an administrative offense rather than a crime in Mexico. Analysts note that a partial impetus for the enactment in 2011 of Mexico's Migration Law (*Ley de Migración*), which purported to bring a human rights focus to migration policies, was to ensure that the Mexican government recognizes its own obligation to protect migrants, particularly as this is what Mexican authorities have asked from their U.S. counterparts in terms of Mexican migrants.<sup>36</sup>

While this legislation appeared to expand the scope of rights recognized in favor of Central American migrants, many advocates have expressed concern that the legislation continues to view migration through the lens of national security,<sup>37</sup> an approach that exacerbates already rampant crime and human rights abuses against migrants in transit.<sup>38</sup>

## Early Signals from the Peña Nieto Administration

As a candidate, now-President Enrique Peña Nieto, inaugurated in December 2012, affirmed that, "In immigration policy, we will treat immigrants in Mexico the same way that we demand that our compatriots are treated abroad." Once in office, Peña Nieto committed to "turn human rights commitments made on paper into reality."<sup>39</sup> However, what these pronouncements mean for migrants who face a gauntlet of violence and exploitation when crossing through Mexico remains to be seen.

More immediately, many migrants' rights advocates have raised concerns regarding Peña Nieto's strong interest in ramping up enforcement efforts at Mexico's southern border,<sup>40</sup> viewed as troubling by some advocates and politicians in Mexico, who object to a force tasked with stopping Central American migrants in transit—in other words, a body assigned to do the "dirty work" of the United States.

Advocates were further troubled when President Peña Nieto chose Ardelio Vargas Fosado, a law enforcement official with a troubling human rights track record, to lead the INM, an agency already plagued with accusations by the federal government and civil society groups alike as having persistent problems with corruption, including human trafficking, kidnapping, and extortions of migrants.<sup>41</sup> During the Calderón Administration, roughly 15% of the total workforce of the INM was removed because they failed to pass accountability tests and/or for presumed acts of corruption.<sup>42</sup> Renowned human rights defender and director of a migrant shelter in Ixtepec, Oaxaca, Father Alejandro Solalinde, called the hiring of Vargas Fosado a slap in the face to migrants.<sup>43</sup>

## U.S. Efforts in Response to the Humanitarian Crisis

U.S. policymakers have recognized the humanitarian crisis of migrants in transit through Mexico to the United States. The *2012 Report on Human Rights Practices in Mexico* issued by the U.S. State Department



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noted ongoing reports of “kidnapping of undocumented migrants by criminal groups to extort money from migrants’ relatives or force them into committing criminal acts on their behalf.”<sup>44</sup> The Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection has announced plans to run public service announcements in Central America warning of the dangers of making the journey through Mexico. Despite knowledge of these dangers, Central American migrants often choose to make the journey because violence in their home countries forces them to flee, calling into question the dissuasive effect of such announcements. As the United States Congress considers immigration reform, measures to ensure that Central American migrants traveling to the United States to be reunited with family members or fill jobs can make this journey safely and out of the shadows should be included in discussions.

The United States has provided equipment and training to Mexico’s security forces and the INM through the Merida Initiative, despite longstanding concerns that human rights abuses committed by both entities remain in impunity, a tangible contradiction of the human rights requirements attached to the Merida Initiative by Congress. Using diplomatic channels, U.S. officials have urged Mexican authorities to beef up security on their southern border. Secretary Napolitano met with Mexican officials in January 2013, partly to discuss improving security on Mexico’s border with its Central American neighbors, something the new president, Enrique Peña Nieto, has promised to do.<sup>45</sup> However, as impunity for abuse and violence against migrants remains the norm, the human rights implications of such efforts are concerning for advocates on both sides of the border.

## Migrant Rights Defenders in Mexico under Attack

In Mexico, religious and civil society groups, not the government, are the primary providers of humanitarian assistance for migrants, including food and shelter, as well as other activities to promote and protect the rights of

migrants. As their work to protect and defend migrants impedes groups seeking to exploit and extort migrants, defenders have faced increasing attacks from both organized crime and corrupt officials.

In recent years, migrant rights defenders across Mexico have endured a barrage of targeted threats, including physical attacks, death threats, slander campaigns by the media and corrupt public officials, and robbery of sensitive information. Migrant shelter workers have reported that members of organized crime have brazenly entered migrant shelters to threaten or even kidnap migrants,<sup>46</sup> or pursue migrants who may have escaped from stash houses.<sup>47</sup> Between 2004 and November 2012, migrant rights defenders in Mexico endured 128 attacks. During the five-year period between 2004 to 2009, there were 18 attacks reported; during the first 11 months of 2012, attacks surged to 49. Although the perpetrators are unknown or identified with organized crime in many of these attacks, authorities are believed to be the aggressors in at least 50 of these incidents.<sup>48</sup> However, many threats go unreported, and defenders have expressed concern that corrupt or disinterested authorities can put the defenders and migrants at greater risk if they report crimes and abuses.

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As just one example, Ruben Figueroa and Father Tomás González of the “72” shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco have been repeatedly threatened by criminal groups associated with Los Zetas after denouncing the extortion of migrants riding on the roofs of trains between Tenosique, Tabasco and Coatzacoalcas, Veracruz. In the first few months of 2013, criminals stated that they wanted “the head” of Father Tomás, and criminals who had been denounced for extortion by Father

Tomás and migrants housed in the shelter were freed by local authorities; one of them subsequently came to the shelter itself as a sign of intimidation. Despite these threats, shelter workers remain steadfastly committed to justice, saying “When we find out that a (Mexican) immigration agent has beaten, mistreated, raped or persecuted someone; when we find out that criminals are in cahoots with authorities and charge a migrant US\$100 to be allowed to move on without being detained, we cannot remain silent.”<sup>49</sup>

Although international institutions and national organizations have called on the Mexican government to protect migrant rights defenders, the failure to ensure adequate implementation of protective measures and, much more significantly, the lack of ability or interest in investigating these crimes has allowed them to continue unabated. The failure of the state to protect the important work of migrant rights defenders has resulted in the closing of multiple shelters in various regions of Mexico, including centers in the states of Chiapas, Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosí, and the State of Mexico.

In April 2012, following years of intense work by Mexican civil society organizations, the Mexican Congress unanimously passed the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, thus establishing a mechanism to implement preventative and protective measures to defenders and journalists who have received threats and attacks. Although some progress has been made to initiate this protection mechanism, Mexican state and federal authorities have not provided the necessary political will and resources, including sufficient trained personnel, to ensure effective implementation of the mechanism, leaving human rights defenders vulnerable to violence and attacks.

## Recommendations

Beyond any facts and figures, the testimonies contained in the pages that follow provide critical insights that help us grasp the humanitarian crisis that confronts migrants

in Mexico. The senseless pain and injustice suffered by thousands of Central American and Mexican migrants have persisted for far too long without an adequate response. We direct the following recommendations to the governments involved:

### Recommendations for the Mexican Government:

- Hold those who perpetrate crimes and abuses against migrants accountable, including members of organized crime and government officials who commit abuses or work in collusion with criminal groups to extort or kidnap migrants, by carrying out thorough and effective investigations and prosecutions of criminal complaints made by migrants and their defenders.
- Ensure migrant victims have access to justice and are eligible for humanitarian visas—and are provided adequate support and protection whether they decide to remain in Mexico or return to their country of origin.
- Establish a regional rapid response mechanism in coordination with authorities in Central America to assist families in their countries of origin trying to find a missing loved one in Mexico.
- Protect and publicly recognize the important work of migrant rights defenders and provide the political will and resources necessary for robust implementation of the human rights defender and journalist protection mechanism, and other measures to ensure that threats, violence and other crimes against them are thoroughly investigated and prosecuted.
- Recognize that the majority of crimes committed against migrants and their defenders occur in the framework of organized crime and thus fall under federal jurisdiction.
- Broaden the migratory statuses available to Central Americans in Mexico to reduce the use of clandestine migration techniques, including smugglers, and facilitate and allow for regularization of immigration status.

- Advance DNA databases to identify the thousands of unidentified remains found in mass graves and elsewhere along the migrant route and deliver the remains to their families.

### **Recommendations for the United States Government:**

- Enact comprehensive immigration reform to facilitate family reunification, including legal status for undocumented Central Americans, reducing the number of migrants forced to transit through Mexico clandestinely.
- Take steps to curtail deportation practices that place migrants at greater risk of violence and exploitation, including the elimination of lateral repatriations that move migrants to high-risk zones and night-time deportations. Ensure migrants' belongings are returned before deportation.
- Identify individuals who are victims of trafficking and kidnapping and ensure access to appropriate humanitarian visas and assistance.
- Factor in the security situation and access to shelter and social services at repatriation locations when determining deportation policies and practices at the southern border. Both the United States and Mexican governments should incorporate factors that indicate possible threats to the life and safety of migrants when negotiating and carrying out local repatriation agreements at the U.S.-Mexico border.

- Ensure that U.S. policies mitigate, not create, economic and security "push" factors in Central America and support long-term solutions to the root causes of migration.
- Address ways in which the United States contributes to generalized violence in Mexico by halting the flow of firearms across the southern border and ending support for the failed strategy of the militarization of public security. Instead, support efforts to strengthen Mexican institutions to more effectively combat corruption and impunity for human right abuses.

### **Recommendations for the Governments of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Other Countries of Origin**

- Collaborate in regional mechanisms to search for missing migrants, assisting families who remain in the country of origin to access investigative and justice mechanisms in Mexico.
- Ensure adequate follow-up attention to migrant victims who return or are deported after having suffered crimes or human rights abuses in Mexico.
- Prioritize education, health, criminal justice and citizen security policies that reduce "push" factors at home.



## TESTIMONIES *(Note: All names have been changed.)*

In the house where they took us . . . there were migrants who had been there for several days and even weeks. Some did not have fingers or toes and some were missing hands and arms. The kidnappers had cut them off because their families had not responded or could not pay. I can say that they had no respect even for age because there were about five boys who were about 15 years old and they had also had their fingers cut off. The poor guys were always moaning in pain and at night they cried a lot. They had fevers and little by little they were bleeding to death. Even though we couldn't approach them because our kidnappers hit us when we tried, I was able to help one of the boys. His name is Eduardo and he is from Honduras. I think he is probably dead by now because he had been there for two weeks and he was very thin. They had cut three fingers off of him, two from the right hand and one from the left. I would give him my bread when the kidnappers weren't looking because every day they came with a piece of bread and some water for each migrant. They always threw the bread at us, and they shouted at us and called us names.

***Daniel Palomo Coto, age 20, Honduran, common-law marriage, one daughter***



On June 29, at about 11:30 in the morning, I was at the Reynosa bus station when I was approached by a guy who had a pistol concealed in his clothing. He started walking next to me and he put the pistol in my ribs and told me I should walk with him and get into the black SUV that was there. I tried to gesture to the guards at the bus station so that they'd do something, but they pretended not to see me. I got into the car and saw there were already two Hondurans there. The kidnappers told me not to worry, that all I had to do was give them the telephone number of my family. After a while, they brought two Guatemalans into the car, too. Then one man communicated by radio to another who told him he had the information about which house they had to take us to.

We got to a house in a residential neighborhood, a place with a very large black gate that is opened by remote control. There were two men outside who looked like police officers who were guarding the house. Inside, I found that they were holding another 85 migrants there—all of them Central American, except for two who were Chinese. And all of them were in the same room except for the little ones who were between the ages of five and twelve. They were taken from their mothers and were held in a separate room. One of the kidnapped women, an older woman, told us that we had arrived in hell, that we should have run when they first grabbed us. Afterwards, they took us to the punishment room which was there in the same house; they asked us for phone numbers and they beat us. That first week, they beat me every single day. I kept telling them that I didn't have any phone numbers or any support from anyone in the United States, but they didn't believe me. After about two weeks, the same one who had kidnapped me told me that I had to collaborate, because if I didn't, they were going pull off one finger and then another until I talked. I realized that that could actually be true, because one of the Hondurans there was missing a finger and, also, the torture room was full of blood. They beat us so badly that they had to drag us all out of there. I explained to them that I don't have a family, but that just made them punch me again. This whole time, they were only giving us food once a day—a plastic bag with rice and beans, and a gallon of water that we had to share among ten people.

After three weeks, at around 2:00 in the morning, they came into the room where they were holding all of us, and they made us all kneel on the floor, facing the wall, with our hands above our heads. Then they did things that they frequently did with the women. They took a girl who was 14, put her in the middle of the room, and started to undress her. She was screaming and saying no, because she was just a girl, but they didn't care. They started to abuse her sexually, but we put up a fight. We stood up and jumped on them, because there were only three of them. We managed to take a pistol away from one of them, but the others called their pals, and about nine others arrived and they beat us all horribly. They beat my friend's forehead in with the butt of a pistol, and they kicked me in the ribs until I vomited blood. They tied me up with a rope and they beat my legs with two by fours. I couldn't move or sit. I still haven't completely healed from that. From that day on, they treated us even worse, and every day they threw water and urine on us in addition to kicking us. On my birthday they gave me another beating. I thought the day of my death had arrived, because everything got really dark, and I didn't see a way out. The only thing I could do was to pray to God to soften the hearts of the kidnappers.

On Saturday, August 1, at around 1:30 in the afternoon, a whole bunch of cars and trucks arrived. We could hear gunshots, and that was when we wondered if maybe they were fighting with other group of people from their same gang. All of a sudden, we heard someone knocking down the gate and saying that nobody should move. It was the Army, but at the time, we were very afraid and didn't know what was happening, so several of us ran into the town center of Reynosa. There were six others with me, including a pregnant woman. We got to a church and they helped us there. The woman was hospitalized because of the blows to her stomach, and they gave me money to go back to Monterrey.

***Jesús Guevara, age 29, Salvadoran, married, 2 daughters and 1 on the way***



On my way to the United States, my companions and I were travelling by train near Monterrey and the Zetas made us get off the train. Everyone started to run, but one of them caught up with me and started to attack me and punch me because I was trying to escape. I woke up the next day, all bruised and with blood all over my face. I was able to escape and I reached a nearby town where I found a couple who helped me. They took me to the Red Cross and from there, they took me to the migrant shelter.

We had already been kidnapped once before in Medias Aguas where we were held all day and night. That time, people with machetes and pistols made us get off the train. They took us to the woods and they took advantage of us, abused us sexually, and then left us lying there. It was there that one of the young men that had also been kidnapped escaped and managed to call the Mexican border unit called the Grupo Beta. They arrived and helped us. They took us to the police station to make a statement about what had happened to us. Then they took some of us to the Casa del Migrante (migrant shelter) and others to an immigration post.

Since the authorities were not doing anything for us, we lost hope, and as days went by, we decided to continue on our way.

This is the first time I have ever left Honduras and I left there because of my children, because I am not receiving any support from my partner. Now because of the rapes I endured, I am pregnant, and I don't know what to do.

***Rocío, age 28, Honduran, single, two children***

On Monday, August 3, when I was with my companions on the train tracks in the area before Chontalpa, I met three *coyotes*. They had several people in a wagon. A little way back, by the cement factory, they had alerted us about an immigration checkpoint up ahead. I heard one of the *coyotes* talking on his cell phone. He was saying that he already had the good ones, and he would send the worthless ones over to the other guy. He had warned us about the checkpoint so we had gotten off earlier, and we gathered around them. They just told us not to ruin their trip, that they had some great merchandise. They said that because they had 5 Brazilians and 2 Indians in the wagon. We thought they were good people and so we followed them.

The *coyotes* offered to take us to the closest station because the next train hadn't come by, so they made some calls by cell phone, and three white trucks arrived—kind of like cattle trucks, but with green canvas covering the grill on the back. About 40 of us migrants got into their trucks, and they drove us for about three hours in those trucks. They drove very badly and all of us started to get suspicious. Since we were very thirsty, we asked them for water, but they threatened us with their weapons. Soon we got to a gas station, and we all started making a lot of noise. We screamed that we were being kidnapped, and one of the migrants broke through the green canvas covering the truck. Someone heard us and called the police, so they drove on another five minutes when the police arrived and stopped the three trucks. The kidnappers spoke with the Federal Police and I heard one of the kidnappers talking by cell phone with a lawyer. After a while, the police said that we could continue. We asked if we should go with them and they said no, that we should get back into the kidnappers' trucks. So we knew we had been sold out. Then, we started to run, but many were threatened with weapons again and told to get back on the truck. Among them was an eight-year-old boy, his father, and several women.

***Sandro Vázquez, age 27, Honduran, common law marriage, four children***

***Alejandro Gómez, age 34, Salvadoran, single, three children***



When I got off the bus at the terminal in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, a young Honduran man who was tattooed with the letters of the Mara Salvatrucha gang approached me. He told me that I had been reported and that I had to go with him. I suspected that something bad was happening so I tried to resist going with him. But he told me he was a member of the Zetas and that I shouldn't try to escape. He said the people at the terminal knew exactly what was happening, but since they were all being watched, they would do absolutely nothing [to help me]. Then he turned me over to four policemen, who were dressed in blue and carried small pistols.

The policemen put me in a blue and white SUV-style patrol car. They took me across the street from the bus terminal to a park with a lake. They started to look through my things, searching for telephone numbers. As they did it, they apologized, saying that they were very sorry but that they were under orders from the Zetas. I asked them to let me go, but they said that they couldn't and that only God could help me now. They found the phone number for my brother in Miami and my mother in Honduras. They called my brother and told him that I had been kidnapped and that he had to deposit \$3,000 ransom into a bank account. Then they put me in a kind-of-new, little red car. It took about an hour to get to the house where they held me. I had a pistol pointed at me the whole time. They also hit me with a board on my back and made me chew a box of electric gum. All of this was to try to force my family to give them the money, even though I had already told them that they were going to pay.



We got to a warehouse that was pretty big. It was white and had a black gate. Inside, there were dogs and chickens. There were a few mattresses, just enough for five of us to lie down on each one, because there were another 40 people kidnapped besides me, and there were five more kidnappers too. There were three women, a 15-year-old boy, another 13-year-old boy, and many others. There, they put me to work, cleaning chickens and cooking. Once they took me to work on a ranch. There were about eight people total guarding us. One of them was a Honduran who had a scar near his eye. Another one seemed like he was blind in one eye. There was a young guy with a parrot tattooed on his arm, and another who had the name Kevin tattooed on his fingers. There was also an old Salvadoran man with a braid. Sometimes, the men would hit us and at the same time they would apologize, saying that they didn't want to do this but that the Zetas were forcing them to. One even prayed with us because he is a Christian. In the morning they gave us coffee and bread. Then, at about 1:00pm they served us a few tortillas with some beans, and at dinner the same thing. They hit us so that we would talk. They cut the little finger off of one boy so that he would give his phone number. They did really bad things to us; I don't really want to say what, right now. I can only say that I helped them by heating the tortillas and by cooking so that they wouldn't mistreat me anymore. Talking with the others there, I found out that there are also people watching the bus stations in Monterrey and Reynosa. They fool some of the people by saying they are guides and that they will help get them over to the other side, but others, like me, they just take by force.

I was held prisoner for 15 days as we waited for my mother and my brother to get together the money to free me. My mother had to sell the business that I had in Honduras. They were only able to scrape together \$2,700. But the kidnappers decided to accept it, so one Wednesday afternoon, they took me to the park near the bus station and they let me go. I had to beg for money at the bus station to get enough money for the bus. Now I don't ever want to go north again.

***Mauricio García, age 27, Honduran, single, no children***



On March 4, 2009, I was kidnapped in Apizaco, Tlaxcala. Four of the Zetas, including one woman, kidnapped us when we were riding inside one of the railroad cars. They were on the car with us. First they attacked us and took our money and everything we had. Then, they made us get off the train and get into a truck. There were about 25 of us there. The truck was dark and enclosed and we were there all day. On the way, they demanded we give them money and when we said we didn't have any, they beat us and threatened us constantly.

When we arrived at the house where they ended up holding us, three other people were waiting for us there. By their accent, I can say that they were Mexicans. The house was small. There was no furniture; just rooms. They took us into one of the rooms and continued beating us. Some of the people in that house had been there for a longer time because their family members had not sent any money to the bank account number they had been given to make deposits to. They continued to be beaten because they weren't able to give the 600 "pesos" (dollars) that they were demanding.

I was only held for one day, because I told them I didn't have any family members or any money, and that was why I was trying to migrate to the United States. They took me and four other people in the truck to an isolated place far from the house where we had been. The

others were freed because they had paid. I was just lucky, because my family gave absolutely nothing. But everyone else that had been with me on the train are still locked up and we don't know how much longer they will be there.

***Olvin López, age 15, Honduran, single, no children***



My name is Nancy. I am a Salvadoran and I was kidnapped and held prisoner from April 13 to June 22. They got me in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz....

They took us to Reynosa and on the way, we went by the checkpoints of the National Migration Institute and the Federal Police who saw what was happening and still didn't do anything. They just took the money they were given to keep quiet. The kidnappers were telling us that we should take a good look at what was happening and realize that they had everything bought and paid for. One of the men started to harass us because he wanted to sexually abuse the women who were in the group. One of our male companions got angry and tried to defend us, but he couldn't, because they raped him, too, and then they beat him to death. He fell to the ground dead in front of me, but before he died, he told me and my other two women friends to please talk to people and tell them what was happening.

We circled the highway around Reynosa for about 15 minutes. Before we got to the safe house, they took us out of the car in a place where they rent cargo trucks, because they said that the Zetas were going to count us. Afterwards, they put us in a white pickup truck and we were all piled up in the back of the truck. We got to a very big house across the street from a soccer field. They had us in that house until the following happened: A Honduran woman by the name of Sara was pregnant and she had already been held prisoner for a long time. She just told me her name was Sara and that a time might come when she would forget her name, and she wanted me to remind her of what her name was if that happened. And it was true. After a few days, she couldn't even remember her name and she just cried all the time. Then, the baby began to be born and no one helped her. In fact, they hit her so that she would stop complaining. The baby was born but the placenta never came out, and after two hours with no one helping her, she bled to death there. They took the baby and I don't know what they did with him. The kidnappers did nothing with Sara's body. They left it there, and we had to be in the same room with the dead body until it smelled so bad that the neighbors realized what had happened and told the Army that something strange was happening in that house. I found out that people from Migration tipped off the kidnappers, so then they moved us somewhere else and left Sara's body there.

Afterwards, two of my women friends were freed because a ransom was paid for them and they went to turn themselves in to Migration in Reynosa. They told the agents there what had happened and then the Migration agents sold them back to the Zetas. They were brought back to the house, and they were killed and given as an offering to the *Santa Muerte* (the Saint of Death).<sup>50</sup> They made all of us pass by and kneel in front of the altar with the two dead women there, in order to ask *Santa Muerte* for forgiveness.

During this whole time, there were three Mexican men who were the bosses who kept coming in. They were looking for the women who were there, so they could have sex with us. The three of them raped me many times. They also proposed that I work for them; they wanted me to go to El Salvador and bring people for them, and they said that nothing was going to happen to me because everything was all arranged. First I told them I would, because I

thought when they freed me, I could go and report them. But then I became very afraid and I told them no. Then I had to wait until my aunt had gotten together all of the money they were demanding to free me. Two weeks later, she deposited the amount of money that they had asked for and I was freed. I remember it was July 5th, the day of the elections. They took a lot of them [the prisoners] out to vote. They gave them a voter ID card and told them to vote for a particular party—I don't remember which one, but it was the one that won the elections, because they were all really happy, and they even lowered the amount of the ransom for the people who had gone and voted.

***Nancy, age 24, Salvadoran, single, 1 daughter***



They took us to a large farmhouse where they have women who work fixing food and cleaning. In Tamaulipas . . . the boss called me in. He took me for a ride in his truck and tried to convince me to work with him. He offered me money in dollars. He offered me cars, drugs, and women, but I didn't accept.

From what they were saying, I understood that in Nuevo León, they also beat the men with boards and sell off the women as prostitutes. Every woman costs 5,000 dollars or so depending on whether she is pretty or just so-so.

***Álvaro Méndez, age 34, Salvadoran, married, three children***



I don't remember anything about the place where we were, because they took us with blindfolds on, but I remember that they asked for \$150 to set us free. They wanted the phone numbers of our family members and they also wanted us to carry some packages across the border for them. I told them that I didn't have any money and that I didn't have any family members supporting me. There were another 15 people in the place where they were holding us; six women, seven men, and two children. During the four days that I was kidnapped, I heard people crying a lot because they hit us, they threatened us, they insulted us, and they burnt cigarettes on our body parts so that we would talk and give them telephone numbers. I saw that some people were taken out and that they didn't come back. I don't know what happened to those people.

***Freddy Velásquez, age 16, Salvadoran, single***



They got me in Tenosique. Some men there told us that we had to give them money for them to stop the train. They also told us that they were guides and that they could take us to Coatzacoalcos free of charge. We got on the train with them and with 140 other migrants. Everything seemed normal at first but before we got to Coatzacoalcos, they made us get off and they forced us all to get into some SUVs and a big white truck. The SUVs were very big; one was grey and the other was white. The truck had a canvas over the back that covered us so no one could see us. We were all piled in like matchsticks.

They took us to a house that is near what is supposedly a migrant shelter near the train tracks. The house was so small that we could only fit in standing up because there were other kidnapped people already there. There, they asked us for phone numbers [of our family members] while they threatened us with pistols, telling us that they were going to kill us. They only gave us each one piece of bread a day to eat, but those who had money were able



to ask for things from the store. Like I said before, we didn't all fit inside, so when it was time to sleep, they took us out into the patio and we had to sleep there amid all of the mud puddles. The only thing I can say about the kidnappers is that they were all Hondurans, that there were two women among them, and that all of them had tattoos.

*Johnny Quintana, age 18, Honduran, one son*



I was crossing through Guatemala with a young guy who made friends with me. We were travelling together. When we got to Tenosique we ran into a group of seven other guys and we decided to join up with them. I told them that all of us should travel together and organize to defend ourselves and so I sent some out for water and others for food. At that time a guy they called Henry came up to me and asked me if I was the guide for the group. I said that I wasn't, that maybe I was a little bit of a leader, but that I wasn't charging them or anything like that. A bald guy also came up to me and he had a cell phone. The two of them tried to make me say that I was a guide. I told them I wasn't, that I knew the way—which actually wasn't true—but that I wasn't a guide or anything. When my friends got back, they told us we should get into their train car so we could travel together. We followed them and then the bald guy made a call on his cell phone. He told us that his boss had told him that there were immigration agents on the road ahead and so we should write our names down in a little booklet so that when we went through the checkpoint, they wouldn't do anything to us. He told us that he was a guide and that he was going to take us to Coatza, but that if we didn't have money to go beyond that, not to worry, that he would let us go and that would be it. The train started to move and about a kilometer before the bridge, which is right before you get to Coatzacoalcas, near a dirt road, other people down below made the train stop. The machinist gave machetes to the guides. At the same time a white Ford 450 truck with a green bed cap, a black Chevrolet truck, a white Ford truck, and a green Dodge—all fairly new models—came driving up to where we were. The people began to shout and cry as they were pulled away. They grabbed me and made me get into the biggest vehicle. They threatened all of us with their AK-47s and rifles.

When we were in that Ford 450 truck, we were all very sad and anxious. They drove on rough terrain to get around the first National Migration Institute checkpoint. Then we went on a highway and went past another Migration checkpoint. We were stopped, but the migration agent talked to the drivers and then let us go. Further ahead there was a checkpoint with two patrol cars, two motorcycle patrollers, and an SUV all belonging to the Federal Police. The guides opened the back doors of the truck where we all were and the federal policeman saw us there, all piled up and crying, and said, "OK, that's fine." He talked with the guides and then let the truck continue on. On the way, the kidnappers hit some of the victims with the butts of their pistols and they threatened all of us and abused us verbally. There were about nine kidnappers travelling with us. They all seemed like Mexicans. One of them, who had pictures of women tattooed on his back, was fondling the women who were with us and telling the others to set these women aside for him. Another important thing is that when we were riding in that car, we heard them talking on their cell phones and heard that the Army had attacked some of their buddies in Tenosique and that they had gotten someone they called "negro."

After about an hour on the road, we got to a residential house that had some condominiums in front and coconut trees on the sides. The railings of the house were white and the house

was painted entirely a salmon color. Inside the house there were ceramic floors and big closets. It was a three-story house and had a terrace. There were about 20 kidnappers there. Most of them were Mexican, but there were also several Hondurans and a Salvadoran. They put all of us into a room and began to go through our things and try to make us give them the phone numbers that we had. One guy said, “Bring me the *chino*.” They were talking about me because I have Asian-looking eyes. The tattooed Mexican guy came out and they put me in a room that was about four square meters. They asked me if I wanted to work with them. I told them no, that I didn’t work with anyone, and that I was just passing through. They hit me and I fell to the ground. They kicked me until I fainted but they didn’t hit me in the face. One of them, who was high on cocaine, grabbed my testicles and squeezed them hard and asked me who I was working for. I was crying in pain but I told them I didn’t work for anyone. Then the one who was beating me told someone to go get the board, and then he said no, bring the bag instead. They took a plastic bag and tied it over my head. When I breathed the bag got closer and closer to my face until I couldn’t breathe anymore and I started to asphyxiate. They asked me again who I worked for, but I told them I didn’t work with anybody. I couldn’t even lie and tell them that I worked for someone else, because I didn’t even know the names of their adversaries. They brought a board and told me that they were going to hit me with it four times and that if I was still alive, they were going to throw me into the river because the alligators were hungry. Finally, one guy told them to stop and to send me to wash up. At that point, they put another man into the room who they also mistook for a guide, but you could tell he was a poor man (I had talked with him and he told me it was the first time he was travelling). I think they killed the man, because while I was washing I heard him crying out because they were beating him, but then I didn’t hear anything, and when I went by there, I saw blood and a machete. I went out into the room where the others were and when they saw me, everyone started to cry. One by one, they all had to go into the room. There were 119 of us and they raped all of the women. The kidnappers had friends who came by and fondled the women and used them. No one could say anything to them.

Two days later, they said they had 20 *balines*, which meant 20 people who were useless to them, and that we should all be thrown out on the train tracks. The same big vehicle that they brought us in took us back to a place near the station in Coatzacoalcas, about 20 minutes away maximum by car, but before that, we had to wait in hiding for about ten minutes because the Army was coming. The kidnappers called them *perros* (dogs) and wanted to make sure they didn’t see us. I couldn’t walk because of all of the blows to my knees and ankles and because the Mexican stood on my ribs and on my stomach with his big boots. Around five in the afternoon, they let us go. I was very afraid and I wanted to get out of there. They had also threatened me and said that if I talked, things were going to go very badly for me. He said I shouldn’t trust anyone, because I might run into someone up ahead and have it turn out that they also work with them. At eight o’clock that night, I took the train to Tierra Blanca. There in the Migrants Shelter, a young man from the Human Rights Commission interviewed me. He said that they had recorded a lot of cases similar to mine but that the police didn’t do anything about it.

***Daniel González, age 35, Salvadoran, married, two children and one on the way***



I was kidnapped on January 20 between San Luis Potosí and Saltillo. Everything happened near the exit of the train station. The railroad workers didn’t want us sleeping where they were, so they had run us out and that’s why we were there. We were just about to fall asleep

when some men in a *combi* (small van) came for us. They nabbed seven of us, including my twelve-year-old son.

. . . We were kept under lock and key for about three days. They only gave us a little bit to eat and a little water. We were in a very dark room where we couldn't see very well. What I did realize was that one of the kidnappers was fat and had light skin. He was wearing swim trunks and was carrying a machete. They started by asking if we had family members in the north. Since we told them we didn't, they burned lit cigarettes on our stomach so that we'd talk. They only did it to me once, but it was very painful. They told us that if we gave them money, they'd help us get to the United States, but since we didn't have anyone to support us, we told them we would go on our own.

After two days had passed—days that seemed like an eternity to us—they realized they weren't going to get anything out of us. They put us back in the same vehicle and took us near the train station and let us go.

***Blas Rivas, age 52, Honduran, single, 7 children***



Around January 15, 2010, fifteen of us were travelling with a coyote, waiting to cross the Rio Grande. It was about one in the morning when 20 men approached us and asked us who was going to pay the fine for crossing. We didn't know what to tell them, so we said we'd come with a *pollero* (smuggler). But the *pollero* ran off at that moment and crossed the river swimming. He left us there in the hands of the Zetas. Then they threatened us with their weapons and began to beat us with the sticks they had. I still have the bruises and the scars on my legs.

They put us into a very large white truck. There were about 40 people inside and all of us were tied up by our hands and feet. Some of us were restrained with handcuffs and others were tied up with rope. They also put blindfolds on all of us so that we couldn't see where we were going. After about 45 minutes on the road, we arrived at a town called Anahuac and, after that, we went another 15 kilometers further until we got to a small rural house. There was just one bathroom and one room there where the kidnappers rested. I also saw that there were another 45 people who had been kidnapped and were being held prisoner. At this house, they asked for my telephone number. When I didn't want to give it to them, they called me names and beat me. Five days later, I decided to give them my brother's phone number. They tortured us constantly; they threw cold water on us when we were tied up and lying on the floor. I spent all my time crying. They threw tortillas and beans on the floor for us and we had to eat them that way. I realized that many people there had been beaten so hard they had broken arms and legs. This was because they didn't have any family member who was going to pay for them.

I was there for 25 days until my brother was able to get the money together to pay the ransom. They took me, along with four other people, to the road to Anahuac that I think goes to Monterrey. The man who collected the money was about 55 years old, more or less, and he was like everyone's boss. He has curly hair, he's short, and dresses cowboy style.

***Joel García, age 28, Honduran, single, no children***



On February 28, I was on the train tracks from Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, along with two other travelling companions, when three people arrived and began to talk with us. They weren't armed and they seemed fine. They told us they could take us over the border for free. After talking with us, they left with some other people that they had convinced, and we followed them. We believed them and thought we didn't have anything to lose.

They put us all into three vehicles: a truck with a blue canvas cover, a white car, and a pick-up truck with a wooden frame on the back. We were in the car for two hours and the whole time they were asking for phone numbers and telling us that they would take us to the United States if we cooperated with them.

They took us to a hut made of corrugated tin. . . . There, I was able to see that they were holding 150 people they had kidnapped. I also saw how they were beating, threatening, and insulting my friends. Everything was dark. They talked to us one by one and asked us for phone numbers and threaten to kill us if we didn't give them money. Since there were so many of us, we didn't all fit in the space, so we had to remain standing, and we had to sleep that way. Also, during the three days I was there, they never gave us anything to eat.

I was able to escape along with four other companions when the kidnappers left the door open by accident.

***Humberto Morales, age 17, Honduran, no children***



It was January 21 at around nine o'clock at night when my four companions and I were traveling on the train from San Luis Potosí. Right before a power plant near the train station exit, the train employees (*garroteros*) made us get off the train saying we couldn't just hang on to the sides like that. There were four *garroteros*. They had hoods and a blue uniform with yellow straps they use to tie themselves on. We asked them to please let us stay on the train and said we would get off soon when we reached a town, but they didn't want us to. They made us get off in the middle of nowhere. So we lay down on the ground but after a while a truck that I thought was suspicious started circling around us. Suddenly the car stopped and some men with machetes got out of it. They started to come after us. As I was running away, I ran into barbed wire and fell and then one of them threatened me with his machete. They caught all of us and hit us, forcing us to get into the truck.

It took about 15 or 20 minutes to get to the house where they took us, a white house that looked like it could have been part of a public housing project. There were sheep, ducks, and chickens outside. Inside there was a living room and three bedrooms. It was there in the house that they said they hoped we had someone who would step up for us in the United States . . . . They said they had contacts with the *garroteros*, with the Migration Institute, and with the Zetas. In the house there was a Honduran girl named Carolina who took part in beating me. She walked on top of me and called me things like "bastard daughter of your bitch mother," because I didn't have anyone who would pay something for me. She was in charge of that—of beating the women. She called me "bastard daughter of a bitch mother" and said I was trash. One of my companions did give them his number and they called his family and told them they wanted \$5,000 to get him over the border to the US, but that wasn't true. They just took the money and left him there.



At one point, the guy who was the boss put me in a room—just him and me—and he took my clothes off. He kissed my body and said he wanted to have sex with me. I told him no and started to cry. A guy from the same gang defended me and told the boss not to bother me. Then the boss slapped me and asked me which one I wanted to sleep with. Since I had to choose someone, I chose the guy who had defended me, because I knew he wouldn't hurt me. So he and I were left alone in a room, but we didn't do anything. In fact, he gave me advice and told me not to tell anyone that I had a telephone number to call, not for anything in the world. Later, the boss kept after me, bothering me and groping me. He told me he was going to sell me to a coyote who would make me his woman and then take me to the United States.

During the time I was there, I realized that they go to the train tracks and pass themselves off as migrants in order to kidnap people. I know this because when I was there, four others came in. There were a total of 12 of us kidnapped. They hit and kicked all of us and called us names. The men were made to take their pants down and they were hit with a wide board. They also stood on top of them and jumped up and down on top of them. They sent me away after five days because, just like my companions, I had turned out to be a *balín* [someone they couldn't get money from]. The Honduran girl punched me three times as a parting gift. On Sunday at nine in the morning, they let us go and told us to run and not to look back because if we did they would kill us. We got far enough away and when night fell, we had to sleep on top of briars. Later, someone gave us a ride to the closest town, whose name I don't recall.

***María Villegas, age 17, Honduran, single, no children***



I was in San Luis Potosí where some friends and I contacted a coyote (guide) that my family knew and trusted. He told us that he was going to send us a guide so we could continue our journey. We waited for the guide and, then, when we were travelling with him, a stranger began to ask us questions, like where we were from and where we were going. We just told him that we were headed to Monterrey.

The guide took us to the bus terminal where he told us what we were going to do and which bus was going to take us to Monterrey. We left San Luis around 10:30 at night, and after about an hour we got to an immigration checkpoint. Federal Police were there, stopping cars and busses. They stopped the bus we were on and soon they got on the bus to question people. They started to ask us questions and when they realized we weren't Mexicans, they made us get off the bus and they took us to a truck that belonged to the Migration Police. But when we asked them where they were taking us, they didn't answer.

Shortly thereafter, two Suburban SUVs arrived. Two people got out and talked with the people from Migration. I overheard how the Migration people were selling us all off to those people for \$100. Then, they took us off the Migration Police trucks and put us into other trucks that belonged to those people. They took us to a house and I was able to see that it was in something like a nice residential neighborhood. After taking us into the house, they began to ask us questions like "Who was the guide or the coyote?" And they wanted the names of the people guiding us.

We didn't want to say anything, but they started to hit us and we had to tell them about the coyote. They said that they were the Zetas and that the person who was taking us to Monterrey was not paying them their fee—and that they charged all of the coyotes a fee.

When the Zetas contacted the *coyote* who had been guiding us, the *coyote* told them that we had been travelling alone and that we weren't with him. Then they beat us, took away our belongings, and began to demand the phone numbers of our family members, asking for the full names of anyone who might take responsibility for us. They tied us up and took us to the second floor of the house. There we realized that there were many other people who were also kidnapped. They began to call our family members, demanding money in return for our release.

Finally they freed us after my family paid \$2,000. They asked us where we wanted to go and said that they would take us there. They took us back to the Casa del Migrante (migrant shelter) in San Luis.

***Gustavo Sánchez, Honduran, age 16, single, no children***



A group of about 35 of us migrants were travelling by train: 32 men and 3 women. We were passing through Chontalpa when several hooded men stopped the train. They were armed with machetes and pistols. They threatened us and made us get off the train and get on a white fruit truck with wooden slats.

When the truck started moving, they told us that we were going to work on a ranch. We travelled for two and a half days to Tamaulipas. We saw how the police and immigration officials stopped us on the way, and that the kidnappers gave them money.

They took us to a yellow house. It had a wall around it and a white gate. The neighborhood was called Limón or Limones. The house has three rooms and a kitchen. When we got there, they separated us. In one room they put the people who were going to pay them \$3,000 to get them across to the United States. In the other room, they put those of us they considered *balines*—the worthless ones.

Then another group arrived with nine men and two women. They separated the men from the women. The men they kept naked and tied up, and they always beat them with boards. They have two boards, one larger than the other. They called the bigger one “Chavela” and the smaller one “Chavelita.” They threatened us all the time with their weapons and their machetes. They didn't give us anything to eat.

They made us women clean house the whole time. We also cooked and washed their clothes. We made better food for those who had “confirmed.” Those who hadn't confirmed only received food once a day, if at all—just rice, eggs, or beans. They touched us and abused us sexually whenever they felt like it. They also threatened us by passing the machete by our breasts, saying they were going to cut off our breasts if we didn't obey them.

We were held prisoner for a month and a half, until one day, they told us that they were going to send us to San Luis Potosí so that we could go back. They said they didn't want to see us near the river. They warned us that the river was theirs, and that we would have to pay them a fee if we wanted to cross it. When we were headed to the bus station, we heard that they had been warned by radio that five truckloads of Army men were coming from Victoria, so they took us back to the house, got out their suitcases, and left. They left us alone and we escaped.

***María Hernández, Guatemalan, age 23, single, no children***

***Arturo Flores, Honduran, age 22, partnered, one child***

***Walter Torres, Honduran, age 34, married, three children***

. . . On one occasion, they were drugged and angry because they didn't have many people kidnapped. They got angry with me and handcuffed my hands and my feet. They did that with the migrants they kidnapped. They told me that they wanted me to pay the fee. I told them that my family doesn't have any money, but then they punched me and slapped me.

I saw how they killed two migrants. They beat one of them so badly that he couldn't even move. He just asked me for water, but I couldn't give him any because the kidnappers were there. After he laid there for a long time on the brink of death, they took him away. When they came back, I heard them say that he hadn't made it so they had dumped his body. They shot another migrant whom they were accusing of being a guide, and the boss ordered the other kidnappers to send the man's head to Fito in Nuevo Laredo to show his guys that they should pay their fee.

They freed me after they were convinced that my family would not give them money, but also because I helped them clean, I went to buy beer for them, and I did what they wanted me to do.

***Antonio Sánchez, Guatemalan, age 30, single, three children***



At about 3:30 in the morning, we were on a train in Coatzacoalcos. There, four guys dressed in black grabbed us. Two were Honduran and two were Mexican. They put all of us who were in that place into three trucks with green tarps over the beds. There were about 30 other people in the one I was put in and I couldn't see where they were taking us.

The house they took us to was a pink, two-story house. It had two windows with drapes. The door was a dark brown color and there was a white electric gate. There was no furniture; only mattresses. There in the house, they already had 60 other people. They put us all together and said they were sorry for the scare, but that they wanted the phone numbers of our family members in the United States because they were going to call them and tell them they were going to take us there. The ones who gave phone numbers were called "confirmed" and sent up to the second floor. Then they began to threaten those who didn't have a phone number or refused to give up the numbers. I was there for four days. I did have phone numbers but I didn't give them up. They questioned me, because I was travelling with my husband, and they thought that he was my guide. My husband started chatting with the kidnappers and so they took us in a truck to the train tracks.

Near the Coatzacoalcos central park, we went with a woman who recruits people. They call her "*la madre*." She gave us permission to bathe and to make a phone call. Then she took us to another house. We stayed there for another month, but my husband was taken to cross into the United States. A month went by and I couldn't communicate with him. The only thing I know is that they left him in Reynosa.

Meanwhile, a guy named Victor started to harass me. He talked with me and suggested that I work with them. He said they were going to pay me \$1,000 pesos a month for making food for the people they had. Another one of them raped me after I had been there for 28 days. He knocked on my door and came in. He was drunk and he said that if I screamed, things would be worse for me. Then, I escaped. I waited until everyone left and since they trusted me by then, I took a taxi to the train tracks and I left.

***Jennifer Vázquez, age 21, Honduran, single, one son***



I was attacked and robbed on the train tracks in Chiapas, where you could see that all kinds of things were happening. Some of us were robbed, others were kidnapped, and women were being raped.

After that, I got to the Casa del Migrante where I made a report about what had happened to me on the way, but I continued my journey to Tierra Blanca. But there I was kidnapped along with my travelling companions.

The kidnappers were very aggressive, armed men. They asked us questions about who was guiding us, and they grabbed us and started threatening us with their weapons. They took us to a place that they call “*el punto*” where they held us for a few days. During that time, they kept asking us who the *pollero* (guide) was, but we told them that none of us were *polleros*. They wanted \$3,000 for each person.

They wanted to kill me because I wasn’t telling them who our guide was. We were there for about five days with other people. There were about 35 of us—all Central American—including men, women, and children.

My family paid the ransom and I got to the Federal District and reported what had happened. But there, the Mexican authorities threatened me when I made my statement. They asked me to say things that I had not done. So I decided it was better to say nothing, and I continued on my way.

***Arturo Flores, age 37, Nicaraguan, married, three children***



In mid-July when I arrived in the state of Nuevo León, I was able to get a gig working with seven other people: one from Guatemala, four from Monterrey, and two from Veracruz. Our job was cleaning oil wells in Nuevo Laredo, but we lived in General Bravo.

One day after work, my friends and I went to a store in General Bravo to buy a bottle of ‘Don Pedro.’ After we bought it, some municipal policemen stopped us under the pretext that we had stolen the bottle. They handcuffed us and put us into their truck to take us to jail. After about two hours, the police turned us over to a balding guy with a ponytail. That man put us into a double-cab pickup truck with eight people who said they were Zetas. They started to hit us. They slapped us and hit us with a club-like stick all over our bodies. They blindfolded us and took us to a place they called *la casona* (“the big house”). It took about an hour to get there.

The next day, they made us get into another truck that smelled like diesel and told us they were going to put us in barrels and burn us alive. After about five hours on the road—I don’t know whether we were in Reynosa or Nuevo León, they stopped in a tunnel. There, they took the blindfolds off our eyes and started to hit us with a metal bar, and they screamed at us: “that’s what you get for stealing, you bastards.” Then they took us to a diner where they took off our handcuffs so we could eat. They said that this was our last day, because they were going to kill us.

In Cadereyta, they asked us if we wanted to work for them as *halcones* (“falcons,” or lookouts) and said that all we had to do was to tell them when there were soldiers on the



road. I said yes in order to save my life. Then they took me and my companions to a firing range, where they introduced us to the boss. He told us that if we wanted to leave, we could leave. They gave us food, fruit, and water. They treated us very well and gave the order for us to be taken to a hotel. The next day, the boss showed up at the hotel to give us food and 200 pesos, saying that we would see each other the next day. But he never showed up. After three days, a skinny guy showed up to tell the guys who were guarding us that they could let us go because they had killed the boss. So they set us free.

I was able to hear what the people who were guarding us were saying and I realized that they themselves had killed the boss, because he had kidnapped three kidnappers and he was asking for a ransom of three million pesos for each one of them.

**Walter Amilcar Carrillo, age 22, Guatemalan, single, no children**

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Available in Spanish at *Dimensión, contexto y testimonios de la experiencia de la migración en tránsito por México*. Cuaderno sobre secuestro de migrantes, Centro de Derechos Humanos, diciembre de 2011, [http://www.centroprodh.org.mx/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=92&Itemid=28&lang=es](http://www.centroprodh.org.mx/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=92&Itemid=28&lang=es).
- <sup>2</sup> *Informe especial sobre secuestro de migrantes en México*. Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, February 2011. P. 6, [http://imprasc.net:29572/DocumentosyPub/Documents/cndf\\_informe\\_sobre\\_secuestros\\_de\\_migrantes\\_febrero\\_2011.pdf](http://imprasc.net:29572/DocumentosyPub/Documents/cndf_informe_sobre_secuestros_de_migrantes_febrero_2011.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> These figures exclude “voluntary repatriations” of Central Americans. Secretaría de Gobernación, “Eventos de extranjeros devueltos por la autoridad migratoria mexicana, según continente y país de nación,” *Extranjeros alojados y devueltos*, 2011. [http://www.segob.gob.mx/en\\_mx/SEGOB/Extranjeros\\_alojados\\_y\\_devueltos\\_2011](http://www.segob.gob.mx/en_mx/SEGOB/Extranjeros_alojados_y_devueltos_2011). Secretaría de Gobernación, “Eventos de extranjeros devueltos por la autoridad migratoria mexicana, según continente y país de nación,” *Extranjeros alojados y devueltos*, 2010. [http://www.segob.gob.mx/en\\_mx/SEGOB/Extranjeros\\_alojados\\_y\\_devueltos\\_2010](http://www.segob.gob.mx/en_mx/SEGOB/Extranjeros_alojados_y_devueltos_2010).
- <sup>4</sup> In comparison, the U.S. Border Patrol reported apprehensions of 404,365 Mexican nationals in 2010. Lesley Sapp, *Apprehensions by the U.S. Border Patrol: 2005-2010*. Fact Sheet, Office of Immigration Statistics, July 2011, <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois-apprehensions-fs-2005-2010.pdf>. (Accessed on August 12, 2013.)
- <sup>5</sup> Unlike other regions of the border, non-Mexicans, predominantly from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, make up a slight majority of apprehensions by the Border Patrol in South Texas. “Non-Mexican Migrants Make up Slight Majority of Border Patrol Apprehensions in South Texas,” *Fox News*. FOX News Network, December 21, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/12/21/non-mexican-migrants-make-up-slight-majority-border-patrol-apprehensions-in/>.
- <sup>6</sup> “Asesinatos de migrantes, secuestros, abusos y funcionarios corruptos, la marca sexenal del INM,” November 19, 2012, [www.sinembargo.mx/19-11-2012/4312](http://www.sinembargo.mx/19-11-2012/4312).
- <sup>7</sup> Fernando C. Servin, “Bajo control del crimen organizado, las rutas migratorias en Tabasco y Veracruz,” *La Jornada*, January 5, 2013, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/01/05/index.php?section=politica&article=007n2pol&partner=rss>.
- <sup>8</sup> Javier Estrada, “Las nuevas estrategias del secuestro de migrantes en el sur de México,” *CNN México*, January 5, 2011, <http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2011/01/05/las-nuevas-estrategias-del-secuestro-de-migrantes-en-el-sur-de-mexico>.
- <sup>9</sup> Mass graves have been found in Baja California, Jalisco, Guerrero, San Luis Potosí, Chihuahua, Estado de Mexico and Nuevo León, including a mass grave in Durango where the remains of over 200 individuals have been identified, although it remains unclear how many of these remains belong to migrants. “Aumenta a 193 los muertos por matanza en San Fernando, Tamaulipas: PGR,” July 6, 2011, <http://www.zocalo.com.mx/seccion/articulo/aumenta-a-193-los-muertos-por-matanza-en-san-fernando-tamaulipas-pgr>.
- <sup>10</sup> Sergio Chapa, “59 bodies found in eight mass graves near San Fernando,” *Valley Central*, April 6, 2011. <http://www.valleycentral.com/news/story.aspx?id=602111>.
- <sup>11</sup> In October 2012, authorities announced that they had arrested a leader of the Zetas cartel, Salvador Alfonso Martínez Escobedo, for the 2010 killings of 72 Central and South American migrants in San Fernando, Tamaulipas.
- <sup>12</sup> The 2011 report on migrant kidnapping by Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), *Informe especial sobre secuestro de migrantes en México*, documented 11,333 migrant kidnappings that occurred between the months April and October 2010, and that 8.9% of these abductions involved local, state or federal authorities.
- <sup>13</sup> A CNDH “recommendation” is a public document that provides details and descriptions of cases of serious human rights violations and identifies steps that governmental institutions should take to redress them.
- <sup>14</sup> CNDH Recommendation 54/2012 regarding the sexual assault and attempted rape of a minor by a local INM delegate in Tenosique, Tabasco. In this case, the head of Grupo Beta pressed the minor to drop charges.
- <sup>15</sup> Jorge Carrasco Araizaga, “Agentes del INM, coludidos con el crimen organizado: Poder Judicial de la Federación,” *Proceso*, May 9, 2011, [www.proceso.com.mx/rv/modHome/pdfExclusiva/91087](http://www.proceso.com.mx/rv/modHome/pdfExclusiva/91087).
- <sup>16</sup> Fabiola Martínez, “En una segunda depuración, el INM prevé despedir a 350 funcionarios más,” *La Jornada*, May 18, 2011, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/05/18/politica/007n1pol>. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/05/18/index.php?section=politica&article=007n1pol>.
- <sup>17</sup> Jorge Monroy, “Detectados, 12 casos de corrupción al mes en el Instituto de Migración,” *El Economista*, January 8, 2013, <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2013/01/07/detectados-12-casos-corrupcion-mes-instituto-migracion>.
- <sup>18</sup> “La depuración del INM, para garantizar derechos de migrantes, afirma Peña Nieto,” *La Jornada*, December 19, 2012, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/12/19/politica/017n2pol>.

- <sup>19</sup> Sebastian Rotella, "The New Border: Illegal Immigration's Shifting Frontier," ProPublica, December 6, 2012, <http://www.propublica.org/article/the-new-border-illegal-immigrations-shifting-frontier>.
- <sup>20</sup> Some kidnapped individuals, mainly women, are trafficked as organized crime groups, such as the Zetas, buy Central American women from coyotes or corrupt officials. *Washington Post* reporter Anne-Marie O'Connor notes that, "as organized crime and globalization have increased, Mexico has become a major destination for sex traffic, as well as a transit point and supplier of victims to the U.S." Anne-Marie O'Connor, "Mexican cartels move into human trafficking," *The Washington Post*, July 27, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/americas/mexican-cartels-move-into-human-trafficking/2011/07/22/gIQAmpVcl\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/americas/mexican-cartels-move-into-human-trafficking/2011/07/22/gIQAmpVcl_story.html).
- <sup>21</sup> *Invisible Victims: Migrants on the Move in Mexico*, Amnesty International, 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR41/014/2010/en/8459f0ac-03ce-4302-8bd2-3305bdae9cde/amr410142010eng.pdf>.
- <sup>22</sup> *Informe Especial Sobre Los Casos de Secuestro en Contra de Migrantes*, Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos: Mexico, June 15, 2009, [http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/fuentes/documentos/informes/especiales/2009\\_migra.pdf](http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/fuentes/documentos/informes/especiales/2009_migra.pdf).
- <sup>23</sup> Reports indicate that human smuggling is highly lucrative. In May 2011, Mexican authorities discovered and freed 513 migrants in a truck heading north. All the migrants were found in subhuman conditions, and the majority were repatriated, with 410 sent back to Guatemala. Each of the migrants had paid the coyotes USD 7,000 to lead them to the U.S. "Mexico tightens southern border," *LatinNews*, May 19, 2011, <http://www.latinnews.com/ldb/LDB22759.asp?instance=1>.
- <sup>24</sup> Richard Marosi, "Deportees to Mexico's Tamaulipas preyed upon by gangs," *LA Times*. September 8, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/sep/08/local/la-me-deportee-danger-20120909>.
- <sup>25</sup> Secretaría de Gobernación, Repatriación de mexicanos. Boletín Estadístico 2012, [http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es\\_mx/SEGOB/Repatriacion\\_de\\_mexicanos\\_2012](http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es_mx/SEGOB/Repatriacion_de_mexicanos_2012). Secretaría de Gobernación, Repatriación de mexicanos. Boletín Estadístico 2008, [http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es\\_mx/SEGOB/Repatriacion\\_de\\_mexicanos\\_2008](http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es_mx/SEGOB/Repatriacion_de_mexicanos_2008).
- <sup>26</sup> In 2008, 31.2% of repatriations of Mexicans took place in Sonora. In 2012, this figure had dropped to 17.8%. [http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es\\_mx/SEGOB/Repatriacion\\_de\\_mexicanos\\_2012](http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es_mx/SEGOB/Repatriacion_de_mexicanos_2012) [http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es\\_mx/SEGOB/Repatriacion\\_de\\_mexicanos\\_2008](http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es_mx/SEGOB/Repatriacion_de_mexicanos_2008).
- <sup>27</sup> In their analysis of a series of over 1,100 interviews with recently deported migrants, researchers from the University of Arizona found that ATEP does not appear to impact an individual's decision whether or not to attempt unauthorized reentry into the United States. Jeremy Slack; Daniel Martinez; Scott Whiteford; Emily Peiffer. *In the Shadow of the Wall: Family Separation, Immigration Enforcement and Security*, p. 24 (March 15, 2013). [http://las.arizona.edu/sites/las.arizona.edu/files/UA\\_Immigration\\_Report2013web.pdf](http://las.arizona.edu/sites/las.arizona.edu/files/UA_Immigration_Report2013web.pdf).
- <sup>28</sup> Michael S. Danielson, *Documented Failures: The Consequences of Immigration Policy on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Society of Jesus in the United States. February 13, 2013, [http://www.jesuit.org/jesuits/wp-content/uploads/Kino\\_FULL-REPORT\\_web.pdf](http://www.jesuit.org/jesuits/wp-content/uploads/Kino_FULL-REPORT_web.pdf).
- <sup>29</sup> A recent survey by researchers at the University of Arizona of over 1,100 migrants in shelters in Mexican border cities found that approximately one in five migrants reported being deported between 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. Projecting this number to all deportations to Mexico suggests that tens of thousands of migrants are being deported at night. Returning any migrant during night hours leaves deportees highly vulnerable, lacking shelter, bus services, and wire transfer services. *In the Shadow of the Wall: Family Separation, Immigration Enforcement and Security*, p. 24. March 15, 2013, [http://las.arizona.edu/sites/las.arizona.edu/files/UA\\_Immigration\\_Report2013web.pdf](http://las.arizona.edu/sites/las.arizona.edu/files/UA_Immigration_Report2013web.pdf).
- <sup>30</sup> The very real dangers facing repatriated migrants in cases that include confiscation of belongings, which are further exacerbated when migrants are repatriated at night, formed the focal point of a May 2012 CNN investigative piece. View CNN video report, "Detainees fear deportation to Mexico," March 30, 2012, <http://cnn.com/video/data/2.0/video/us/2012/03/30/deportations-after-dark.cnn.html>.
- <sup>31</sup> Richard Marosi, "Deportees to Mexico's Tamaulipas preyed upon by gangs," *Los Angeles Times*. September 8, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/sep/08/local/la-me-deportee-danger-20120909>.
- <sup>32</sup> José Gil Olmos, "Criminalización, la "bienvenida" a los migrantes," *Proceso*, December 7, 2012, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=327249> "Nuestra gente es obligada a regresar a territorio mexicano sin documentos. La mayoría llegan a una ciudad que desconocen, sin oportunidades de comunicarse con sus familiares, sin ningún apoyo para regresar a sus comunidades."
- <sup>33</sup> *Invisible Victims: Migrants on the Move in Mexico*, Amnesty International, 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR41/014/2010/en/8459f0ac-03ce-4302-8bd2-3305bdae9cde/amr410142010eng.pdf>.
- <sup>34</sup> *Estrategia Integral del gobierno federal para la prevención y combate al secuestro de migrantes*. Derechos Humanos: Agenda Internacional de México, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Dirección General de Derechos Humanos y Democracia, October 11, 2010, [http://mision.sre.gob.mx/oi/images/stories/boletines/2/31\\_DGDH201.pdf](http://mision.sre.gob.mx/oi/images/stories/boletines/2/31_DGDH201.pdf).
- <sup>35</sup> For example, according to the 2012 *Country Report on Human Rights: Mexico*, issued by the U.S. State Department, at the end of 2012 there were no further developments in the cases of the 2010 abduction of 40 Central American migrants from a train and the June 2011 mass kidnapping of migrants riding a train from Oaxaca to Veracruz.
- <sup>36</sup> Francisco Alba, "Mexico: The New Migration Narrative," Migration Information Source, April 2013, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?id=947>.
- <sup>37</sup> Statement by Foro Migraciones and Grupo de Trabajo Sobre Política Migratoria, "Seguirán violaciones de DH a la población migrante, Ley de Migración y su Reglamento no garantizan sus derechos," May 2012, <http://www.cencos.org/node/29175>.
- <sup>38</sup> Henia Prado, "CNDH registra abusos de migrantes," *Periódico AM*, April 24, 2013. (<http://www.am.com.mx/Guanajuato/mexico/cndh-registra-abusos-de-migrantes-11603.html>) The organization Sin Fronteras told Reforma that the restrictive policies in the area of security intended to halt migration have not achieved their intended objective, but instead they have generated a wave of crime and human rights abuses. In the past 7 years, the CNDH has issued 46 recommendations for presumed violations against migrants. According to the CNDH, from January 2005 to April 2013, they received a total of 4,088 complaints, of which 49.8% involved the violation of human rights by migration agents or police against migrants, namely Honduran, Guatemalan and Salvadoran citizens.
- <sup>39</sup> "En política migratoria daremos un trato a los migrantes en México, como el que exigimos para nuestros paisanos en el extranjero." Ana Maria Aragonés, "Peña Nieto ante la migración," *La Jornada*, November 27, 2012, [http://www.jornada.unam.mx/archivo\\_opinion/autor/front/36/34934](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/archivo_opinion/autor/front/36/34934).
- <sup>40</sup> Unlike the U.S. model that focuses on interception of migrants at the border, Mexico has a series of checkpoints and domestic enforcement operations in the interior, with a concentration of these efforts in southern Mexico and throughout known migrant routes. Under Mexican law, the enforcement of immigration law falls under the jurisdiction of only the INM and federal police, although the INM is allowed to request other agencies' support for immigration enforcement operations. However, municipal police and federal security forces continue to inappropriately engage in immigration enforcement operations, leading to excessive use of force and other well-documented human rights abuses. As a candidate, President Peña Nieto contemplated the development of a border patrol for Mexico's southern border. Peña Nieto proposed the idea of a border patrol to prevent the flow of "drugs, arms and to a certain extent so people don't cross." Historically, Mexico has not had a border patrol.

Immigration officers have been unarmed and are not a traditional police force. Instead, they have brought in federal and state officers for support on investigations and operations when requested. The proposal is viewed as a part of a larger security restructuring intended to expand the role of Mexican federal law enforcement, and advocates have expressed concerns about the human rights implications for migrants and border communities. The new administration intends to create a Mexican border police of 5,000 to 8,000 officers to patrol areas between official crossings at the Guatemalan border.

<sup>41</sup> Juan Pablo Proal, "Reprimir a los migrantes, la misión de Peña, Proceso," January 25, 2013, [http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=331634&utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+revista\\_proceso+%28Revista+Proceso%29](http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=331634&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+revista_proceso+%28Revista+Proceso%29).

<sup>42</sup> Although Former Commissioner of the INM, Salvador Beltrán del Río said in an interview in the weeks before his departure, "I can confirm that right now there is not a single Immigration agent working with kidnappers," citing accountability exams and human rights training as addressing these problems. "Destaca Poiré depuración en el INM," *El Universal*, November 14, 2012, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/883219.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Ivan Tirzo, "Nombramiento de Ardelio Vargas en el INM es una 'bofetada': Solalinde," *El Sol de Puebla*, January 17, 2013. <http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldepuebla/notas/n2846324.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. State Department, *2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Mexico*. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=204464>.

<sup>45</sup> Randal Archibald, "In Trek North, First Lure Is Mexico's Other Line," *New York Times*, April 26, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/world/americas/central-americans-pour-into-mexico-bound-for-us.html?ref=todayspaper>.

<sup>46</sup> Fernando Camacho Servín, "Bajo control del crimen organizado, las rutas migratorias en Tabasco y Veracruz," *La Jornada*, January 5, 2013. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/01/05/index.php?section=politica&article=007n2pol&partner=rss>.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Padre Pantoja, Saltillo in "A Panorama of the Defense of Human Rights in Mexico: Initiatives and Risks of Mexican Civil Society." Peace Brigades International/Mexico Project. April 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Of the 128 security incidents, 61 were committed by non-state agents, in 17 cases the aggressor is unknown, and 50 state agents were identified as responsible. *A Panorama of the Defense of Human Rights in Mexico: Initiatives and Risks of Mexican Civil Society*. Peace Brigades International/Mexico Project. April 2013.

<sup>49</sup> "Mexican Friar Defies Gangs to Help Migrants," *Infosur Hoy*, April 11, 2013. [http://infosurhoy.com/cocoon/saii/xhtml/en\\_GB/newsbriefs/saii/newsbriefs/2013/04/11/newsbrief-02](http://infosurhoy.com/cocoon/saii/xhtml/en_GB/newsbriefs/saii/newsbriefs/2013/04/11/newsbrief-02)

<sup>50</sup> *La Santa Muerte*, or the Saint of Death, is known as a religious figure venerated by criminal gangs asking for protection in illegal activities.

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